

**Agency: Department of Education and Early Development****Project Title:****Project Type:** Information Systems and Technology

# Copper River School District - Copper River Connects

**State Funding Requested: \$311,555****House District: 12 / F**

One-Time Need

**Brief Project Description:**

Because of our district's rural geography and limited community transportation infrastructure, it is difficult for us to provide resources effectively across the district. To help meet our current needs and expand opportunities for our students, parents, and community at-large we are proposing Copper River Connects (CRC), a distance learning initiative utilizing interactive video-conferencing systems (IVC) and the Internet to connect people, content, and resources.

**Funding Plan:****Total Cost of Project: \$311,555**

	<u>Funding Secured</u>		<u>Other Pending Requests</u>		<u>Anticipated Future Need</u>	
	<i>Amount</i>	<i>FY</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>FY</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>FY</i>
Federal Funds	\$211,555	10				
State Funds					\$100,000	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$211,555</b>				<b>\$100,000</b>	

**Detailed Project Description and Justification:**

The Copper River Basin area of Alaska is a collection of communities surrounding the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. We are a remote area where temperature extremes can range from -65 to 91 degrees Fahrenheit and where annual snowfalls range from 39 to 61 inches. Weather extremes combined with our remote location and budget constraints limit the opportunities we are able to provide our students and families. We are one of only 14 Alaskan school districts that do not have IVC capabilities. Almost six years ago, our district had a very limited IVC system that connected to district sites only. That equipment became obsolete six years ago and since then we have had no access to distance learning. Without this distance learning system, we are seriously hampered in our ability to provide student special needs services (therapist etc.), crisis intervention, content beyond the core subjects, professional development and resources, and community services.

The Copper River School District serves the residents of the villages of Chistochina, Chitina, Copper Center, Gakona, Glennallen, Gulkana, Kenny Lake, Nelchina, Paxson, and Slana, Alaska. Except for Glennallen, the Alaska Department of Health and Human Services classifies our communities as "Isolated Villages." Glennallen is classified as an "Isolated Town". Isolated Villages are defined as those with between 50-1000 persons in the immediate community, with a community clinic staffed only by an EMT or Community Health Aid, limited air access to a Level III or higher community (over 2,000 persons with a community clinic staffed by a physician), or road access that exceeds 60 miles to that community.

Because of our isolated location, access to special services is extremely limited. We must contract to provide special services from either Anchorage or Fairbanks (187 miles or 227 mile away respectively) to our students. Because of the distance, we must pay for travel, per diems, and accommodations. We have no in-house specialists such as psychologists or speech and occupational therapists. Distance and budget constraints curtail their accessibility and therefore schools have access to a specialist for only a partial day once in every nine weeks. Since our communities do not have resident

specialists, teachers have no support network and our ability to provide on-site training is very limited.

While our staff works diligently to provide for the needs of each of our students, this limited access to services, support and training, creates a gap in what we can provide versus less rural or better funded locations. In other school districts, treatment teams meet with the individual child, family members, and teachers to create effective treatment plans, discuss strategies, and ensure the child's best interests are being served. Since our access to these specialists is so limited, families have little or no contact with them, making it difficult to develop, implement, and follow through with holistic treatment plans that include the individual student, the teacher, staff, and family members. Teachers also have no access to specialists outside of their site visit and must deal with issues on their own as they arise. With IVC, we would be able to contract services bi-monthly and be able to provide our students, teachers and families the ability to communicate directly with specialists in the interim for questions or problems.

Students from rural areas like ours are often lacking in background knowledge afforded to their more urban peers. Background knowledge gained through experience has been documented to increase student achievement in all subjects. The unique geography of our area provides our students with experiences found nowhere else. Unfortunately, the Copper River Basin is such a unique environment that students are often unable to relate to the world outside of the area. They have no frame of reference for things taken for granted elsewhere; for example, what does an apple tree look like? Furthermore, limited exposure to the arts, cultural events, museums, diversified cultures, and technology creates an insufficient background knowledge base for our students and hampers their ability to succeed in post-secondary education or the 21st century workplace.

Finally, unlike many states Alaska has no distance learning system for K-12 schools. In order for us to provide this level of 21st century education we find we must build our own distance learning system and either create or purchase content. The 2009 Alaska Draft Education plan does indicate that the state plans to offer content at some point but without an interoperable distance learning system we will be unable to take advantage of these offerings. Furthermore the plan indicates the state's changing educational philosophy which includes the incorporation of 21st century skills and higher levels of technology integrated into the curriculum.

A Copper River Connects is primarily a distance learning project linking the six sites of the Copper River School District (CRSD) and the office of the Copper River Basin Child Advocacy Center (CRBCAC) to provide shared classes, access to content from remote providers, access to specialists like speech and occupational therapists, professional development, project based learning and community programs. The project connects students, teachers, staff, and specialists at remote sites utilizing an Interactive Videoconferencing System (IVC) through the Internet. Copper River Connects will utilize approved curriculums and best practices for distance learning and will have measurable results such as increased test scores, increases in post-secondary enrollment, hours of therapeutic services offered, numbers of classes delivered, and professional development opportunities delivered.

More specifically Copper River Connects will offer:

- Access to remote and shared content

- Access to distance learning content through GCI School Access

- Dual enrollment opportunities through the University of Alaska system

- Content in AP, advanced coursework, foreign languages, and the arts

- Shared content created at one site to be shared with other remote sites

- Archiving of content to be re-used and for review and remedial purposes (where allowable).

Specialists like speech and occupational therapists to conduct services as appropriate over IVC. Using IVC will give the remote professional the ability to observe behavior and attitude not easily translated over the phone as well as the chance to model and observe behaviors, exercises, etc. Teachers will be able to consult with specialists on as needed basis with much more frequency. Families and treatment teams will be able to meet over IVC. CRSD will continue to contract for on-site services every nine weeks.

- Virtual trips

Virtual field trips and author chats to students and  
Participation in cross-cultural opportunities with schools across the world  
Virtual tours of university campuses and opportunities for our students to talk to college students at remote sites to help build their familiarity with universities and encourage them to attend.  
Creation of project based learning, online content through a web based host that all students, staff, and parents could access remotely. This would include interactive blogs, podcasts and other Web 2.0 features designed to help us prepare 21st century ready students.  
Immediate access to the CRBCAC for consultations, trainings, therapy, and especially in domestic violence and child abuse cases.  
Professional development opportunities  
In-district training provided from a single location to all of our sites  
Training from outside remote sources without having to pay for travel etc.  
Archiving of trainings to be used at a different time at remote sites  
Teachers will be able to connect through the system to work on common problems, provide support networks, and develop collaborative projects. This includes access to special needs and crises professionals.

**Project Timeline:**

Interactive Video Conferencing (IVC) Equipment to be purchased by the end of school year 2010.  
IVC to be installed during the summer of 2010 and fully operational by school year 2010 – 2011.

**Entity Responsible for the Ongoing Operation and Maintenance of this Project:**

Copper River School District

**Grant Recipient Contact Information:**

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Has this project been through a public review process at the local level and is it a community priority? ☒ Yes ☐ No